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September 13, 2013

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H. *JEF*
Director and Health Officer

SUBJECT: **TOXIC EMISSIONS EXPOSURE AND THE EXIDE TECHNOLOGIES PLANT
IN VERNON, CALIFORNIA**

This is to provide you with an update to our August 14, 2013 memo, regarding the Exide Technologies Plant in Vernon, and a proposed program by the Department of Public Health (DPH) to address cumulative health risks in similarly burdened communities.

Subsequent to our last update, the Superior Court ruled to allow Exide to resume operations. There remain substantial comments, concerns, and questions about exposure to emissions from this facility and the degree to which they may place the public at risk. However, since the original risk assessment dated January 2013, several modifications to reduce emissions have been made at the facility. The South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) is presently conducting source testing in order to re-estimate health risk under current operating conditions. SCAQMD is also performing weekly testing of arsenic levels in and around the facility. DPH anticipates receiving the revised risk assessment in September 2013.

We are working with the California Department of Toxic Substance Control (DTSC) to design a work plan to collect both dust and soil samples outside the facility perimeter and within the adjoining residential communities. Working jointly with DTSC will ensure the use of standardized methodologies, scientific accuracy, and the appropriate interpretation of results. DTSC has secured funding to support implementation of the work plan, which is expected to occur shortly.

We are also conferring with DTSC on blood lead testing that DPH will provide to residents in the surrounding communities. We are looking to Exide to fund this testing, which will occur in the months of November and December. We will report our findings to your Board as they are generated.

Since our initial update to the Board, we have met with DTSC to further explore development of a County program aimed at reducing cumulative risks in highly burdened communities, like those in proximity to Exide. This program will focus initially on communities with the highest toxic risk rankings as determined by the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA).

Reducing cumulative risks within these communities will be achieved in several ways. First, DPH will provide local planning agencies with health-protective policies to guide their decision making. The decisions by these agencies can greatly influence the quality of the physical environment and impacts on health.

Second, DPH will work with DTSC and SCAQMD to implement risk reduction measures at existing sites and facilities within these communities. Such measures include stricter criteria for proposed permitting decisions, high priority for enforcement and site clean-up, and enhanced environmental monitoring. Structuring the proposed program to work jointly with DTSC and SCAQMD, and utilizing their full resources and enforcement authorities, will allow the County to achieve optimal risk reduction in these communities.

Despite the resources of DTSC and SCAQMD, and their expertise in environmental monitoring, permitting and site assessment, these agencies would benefit greatly from a broader public health perspective incorporating population vulnerabilities, epidemiology, and demographics. The proposed program will allow DPH to fill this vital role, resulting in improved environmental conditions and reduced risk in highly burdened communities.

To carry out this program, supplemental personnel will be required with expertise in earth sciences, air pollution, toxicology and risk assessment, and environmental modeling. We estimate five FTE will be necessary for implementation of the program, though funding for these positions has not yet been identified. We are preparing a detailed proposal for this program.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please let me know.

JEF:ajb
PH:1307:002

c: Chief Executive Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors